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ABSTRACT

This handbook is a guide to making the most of a work experience educational program for adult women. It is appropriate for independent study or use in a structured program. Part 1 on preparing oneself for a work experience educational program is designed to guide a woman in learning more about herself. Each of the seven sections contains some reading and exercises on these topics: becoming a student again, implications of decision to return to school, experiential learning, self-assessment, career planning, educational planning, and credit for prior learning. Part 2 makes suggestions for finding a job/developing one's own placement. Three sections focus on organizing a job search, employment market, and the hidden job market. Part 3 presents guidelines for taking full advantage of the work experience. Section 1, on preparing for learning on the job, is designed for completion before the job begins. Sections 2-10 contain exercises designed for use after starting work. Areas covered are determining work values, orientation to the workplace, role in the workflow, career ladders, psychology of the workplace, culture and sociology of the workplace, political dimensions of the workplace, economics, and reflections and conclusions. A brief annotated bibliography is appended. (YLB)

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LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

A Handbook for Adult Women Students

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Adult Working-Class Women

LaGuardia Community College
Long Island City, New York

Women's Educational Equity Act Program
U.S. Department of Education

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CE 032 692

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LIFE & CAREER CHOICES FOR ADULT WORKING-CLASS WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with a step-by-step guide to making the most of a work experience educational program for adult women--whether you're involved in such a program now, or are contemplating or seeking one. These pages are addressed to you, the adult working woman. Faculty, staff, and counselors interested in the career and educational concerns of adult women may also find the handbook useful.

We have tried to present the materials in such a way that the handbook would be appropriate for independent study, as well as for use in a structured work experience program. If you are an adult working woman not enrolled in a specific program, or studying in a program that does not include an experiential learning (job) component, you can use this handbook on your own. (You'll want to bear in mind, however, that it was written for women involved in a particular kind of educational program; thus, the language or substance of a particular portion may not apply as closely to your situation. Please make allowances accordingly; use whatever seems appropriate, and ignore the rest.)

Keeping a Journal. You will find that keeping a daily journal greatly increases the usefulness of this handbook. Any notebook or simple diary is adequate for the purpose. Try to write in it every day.

Topics you might consider addressing in your journal include daily experiences that illuminate issues raised in the handbook, additional thoughts you have as you complete the exercises, and positive or negative feelings you have about yourself in relation to the world of work.

One last suggestion: We hope you'll look through the entire handbook before you begin Part I. That way you'll have a better idea of what you want from the handbook, how you plan to use it, and what you expect it to help you accomplish.

The information, advice, and insights contained in this handbook are derived from the experience of LaGuardia Community College in providing structured learning at the workplace in coordination with classroom activities for adult women students.

The students in LaGuardia's Adult Women's Program are mainly urban, working-class women. Most have had limited opportunities to obtain the kind of continuing education that could qualify them for employment and advancement. Although all women have certain common problems, the average working-class woman has perhaps faced the most difficult obstacles. Her experiences with sex discrimination and job segregation have been especially damaging. In addition, her family, neighbors, and friends may have discouraged her from pursuing educational opportunities and expanding her career options. The LaGuardia program is designed to reflect these realities. At the same time, it is meant to nurture and encourage the adult working woman's special strengths and potential contributions to the community, generally ignored or undervalued in the past by the larger society.

When it opened in 1971, LaGuardia was the first community college in the country with work/experiential education for all its full-time students. In 1976-77, LaGuardia began developing program modifications designed especially for the adult woman student. Pilot funding for LaGuardia's Women in the Workforce Program was provided by the New York State Office of Vocational Education beginning in January of 1977, with second-year funds furnished by the United States Office of Education under a one-year grant from the

Women's Educational Equity Act. Development of this handbook was made possible through U.S. Department of Education funds as part of this grant.

The LaGuardia program seeks to tap the career motivations of women with appropriately designed field experiences, which are offered in conjunction with counseling, clarification of goals, analysis of prior experience, and classroom-based activities. Many women's programs provide one or more of these components, but most do not offer coordinated work internships. Field experience--whether in the form of an internship or formal recognition of a student's current job--is the distinctive feature of the LaGuardia program. The objective is to prepare women to move into and/or upward in the labor force, and to enable them to make their work activities satisfying, manageable, and compatible with the rest of their lives.

It is in the workplace that women face the greatest sex-role stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes. Through participation in intensive campus-based support activities coupled with structured workplace experience, women can acquire the skills, attitudes, and general confidence needed to overcome cultural and corporate assumptions. They will be encouraged to develop a basic capacity for life planning and for making appropriate life choices. They will achieve the ability to define work roles for themselves.

It is in this context that we offer you this handbook. Our hope is that you'll enjoy using it, and will find its contents helpful in liberating your talents and energies in new, challenging, and rewarding ways.

Staff members of the LaGuardia program will be glad to share their experiences with interested readers. If you would like to exchange information or ideas with us (about this handbook, or in general), we hope you will let us know.

Good luck!

PART I: PREPARING YOURSELF FOR A WORK EXPERIENCE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

HOW TO USE PART I OF THIS HANDBOOK

Part of what you can expect from an educational program designed for the adult working woman is that you'll learn about working. But consider the other part of that phrase: adult woman. There are a great many things that you can probably learn about yourself as an adult woman that you don't yet know. Perhaps you never thought about yourself in quite the way you are going to in this program. Or perhaps you've drawn some incorrect conclusions about yourself, who you are and what you're capable of, because your sources of information were biased, incomplete, or inaccurate. In any case, learning about yourself is as important a part of this program as is learning about working. In fact, learning about yourself comes first--because what you find out about yourself will have an important impact on what you learn about working, and on how you use your knowledge later on in work and life.

Part I of this handbook is designed to guide you in learning more about yourself: who you are, where you're coming from, and where you want to go from here. Each section in Part I contains some reading plus some exercises that you should find useful, interesting, thought-provoking, and fun!

Depending on the kind of program you're enrolled in, some of the material in Part I may overlap with what is offered in your classes. Or you may find that some or most of the issues covered here are not covered fully in your course work. You can be as selective as you like about what you find in these pages, using only what seems worthwhile to you. In any case, Part I is

designed for a thorough study of you as an adult woman, and it will be most helpful if you review it before you start the on-the-job work experience part of your program.

Try to keep a separate daily journal while you work on Part I. Write down whatever seems important. Later, you'll be able to look back through your journal comments and get a sense of how your thinking has been changing over time.

Good luck on your journey of self-discovery!

1. BECOMING A STUDENT AGAIN

Well, now you are a student again. Congratulations!

As an adult woman, you are different from the traditional young college student in a number of ways; but in other ways, you probably have a lot in common with younger students. It might be useful for you to stop and consider for a moment what your special strengths and skills are, and what your special needs and problems might be; then you can make the most of being a student again.

Consider whether any of the following strengths apply to you:

Special Strengths of the Adult Woman as Student

1. Maturity
2. Lots of life experience
3. Many diverse life skills
4. High motivation

Now consider whether any of the following typical problems apply to you:

Special Problems of the Adult Woman as Student

1. Dismay at the added burdens of being a student; fear of not being able to cope, perhaps for the first time in years.

2. Lack of confidence in your scholastic abilities; rusty study habits; reluctance to compete with younger students.

3. Failure to recognize the useful learning resources you've accumulated over the years; lack of awareness of how skills you do have can be used to good advantage in the school environment.

A later section of this handbook deals in some detail with the process of self-assessment. For now, try completing this short exercise, using your own words.

How I See Myself as a Student

1. My three major strengths, skills, or abilities as a student are:

   a.

   b.

   c.

2. Three important problems or deficiencies I expect to face as a student are:

   a.

   b.

   c.

2. SOME IMPLICATIONS OF YOUR DECISION TO RETURN TO SCHOOL

Your decision to return to school may have come about for a variety of reasons. Perhaps you have a clearly-defined goal in going back to school: you want to qualify for a better job, be able to earn more money, and support yourself and/or your family. Perhaps inflation is eating away at your income; or you are recently divorced or widowed; or your child needs money for tuition or medical care or clothes. Many adult women decide to go back to school for reasons like these.

Or perhaps you have no clear goal in mind. You've decided that your present life situation is not satisfying, and you want to do something constructive about it. Many adult women who go back to school feel this way.

We hope you will find what you're looking for in this program, enjoy the experience, and derive major long-term benefits from it. But whatever your reasons for being here, you are probably about to encounter some difficult problems as a result of your decision to further your education. You may find it helpful to discover the problems that other women like you typically encounter in this situation. Knowing what to expect can help you deal with what happens; knowing that other women have similar problems can make the problems seem less threatening.

Some Typical Problems of an Adult Woman Returning to School

Your Family's Reaction. If you are married, your husband may not agree with your decision to return to school. He may fear that you'll become independent of him or outgrow him. If you're a mother, you may find that your children resent your absence from home and the hours that you need to spend studying. On the other hand, some families are very encouraging and supportive; some husbands and children are willing to help out with household tasks, and adjust their needs and schedules to accommodate yours.

Juggling Roles. The day-to-day management problems involved in being a mother, wife, student, and employee are complicated and burdensome. You may wonder how you'll ever find enough time for your school work, your job, and your family. You may have trouble finding good child care at a cost you can afford. And on some days, you may be torn by conflicting allegiances: your child is sick but you have an exam or have to go to work.

Your Peers' Reactions. Your friends may be critical of your decision to return to school. They may envy you or be afraid you'll grow away from them; or perhaps they're satisfied with their lives and have trouble understanding why you aren't satisfied with yours.

These kinds of problems can be extremely frustrating and difficult to solve. If your program provides counseling services, use them. You're entitled to all the aid you can get. Your counselor's job is to help you solve these problems and to give you some friendly encouragement. If your program doesn't provide counseling, maybe you'll find it helpful to discuss these issues with some of the other women in your program; they are probably facing similar problems themselves.

For now, try doing another short exercise, again using your own words:

Problems I Expect to Encounter as a Result of My Decision to Return to School (and What I'm Going to Do about Them)

1. My three most difficult problems are going to be:

   a.

   b.

   c.

2. I will take action when these problems arise, and try to get help in solving them constructively. Three resources I can turn to for support are:

   a.

   b.

   c.

3. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: WHAT IT CAN DO FOR YOU

Our society changes rapidly these days, affording little time to make the sometimes major adjustments in work, family, and community life that are required of us.

Occupational choices are no longer made once in a lifetime, during adolescence. A person's interests and abilities change, society and its institutions change, occupational patterns shift continuously, and existing jobs become obsolete, even as new ones are created. All students, regardless of age, need the kind of education that will enable them to survive and contribute in our complex, ever-evolving social system.

Experiential learning programs like the one you are enrolled in are designed to educate students to deal successfully with these realities, through real-life experience coordinated with classroom study. The objective is to equip you, the student, with the interpersonal communication, decision-making, and job-related skills you will need in order to investigate and choose intelligently among the career and life options appropriate for you in light of your own abilities, experience, and values.

For you, as an adult working woman, a comprehensive work experience program can be especially useful. Until now, the ways in which you've been educated about yourself through the major institutions of our society (school, home and family, community, church, the media, the workplace) have probably been limiting and restrictive. Society has held up to the average working woman a narrow and flawed mirror that reflects an image of someone fit only for low-status, dead-end jobs. This program will attempt to show you, through your own experiences in and outside the classroom, that there are alternatives. You will acquire the skills necessary to explore and plan for a range of life choices and roles in your family life, community, and workplace.

Consider this description of experiential learning, and think about how it relates to your life. Then answer the following questions in your own words.

Thoughts on Experiential Learning and Me

1. What three kinds of skills does an experiential learning program attempt to teach?

2. Why do people need these skills to deal with the realities of society today?

3. Considering my <u>past</u> experiences in life and work, why could experiential learning--learning through my own new experience--be especially useful to me as an adult woman?

4. What does this kind of program attempt to equip me to do from now on?

4. SELF-ASSESSMENT

The first step in taking control of our lives is to take a realistic look at who we are, where we're coming from, and where we're going, otherwise known as self-assessment.

Self-assessment means examining your life to determine what it says about you--what your values, interests, abilities, aptitudes, skills, and strengths and limitations are. Self-assessment is a form of self-exploration, designed to enable you to make wise life, career, and education decisions based on what you learn about yourself through the process.

Note: Questions that require lengthy responses should not be answered in the booklet; they require additional paper.

That process involves a set of questions that you ask yourself, and then answer (either by yourself, or with the assistance of your instructor and your fellow students). The questions will help you analyze what you have accomplished, what you have learned, and determine what you intend to accomplish in the future.

Following are four kinds of basic self-assessment questions you can use, beginning with value questions:

Self-Assessment of Values*

1. Why do I work?

2. Why do I want to work--to earn money, to help others, to be successful, to develop my abilities, or . . . ?

3. What do I want in life?

4. What would I do if I had $10 million I could spend on myself?

5. What would I do if I had another $10 million to spend only on others?

Now go back over the previous questions, and think about the implications your answers may have for your life and career choices. (For example: if making a lot of money is important to me, but community service isn't, the kind of job I really want may require me to work extra hours, leaving little time for political meetings, public hearings, school board meetings, etc.)

List as many specific implications of each answer as you can:

---

*Source: Guide to Resources for Life/Career/Educational Planning for Adults, p. 25 (see bibliography).

Implications of My Answers to Value Questions

Question #1:

Question #2:

Question #3:

Question #4:

Question #5:

The next type of question you can ask yourself concerns your interests:

Self-Assessment of Interests

1. What do I enjoy doing?

2. What do I find satisfying, fulfilling, rewarding?

3. Whom do I like and why?

4. Whom do I dislike and why?

5. What kinds of people do I enjoy? Why?

Now go back over the interests questions, and list the implications your answers have for your life and career decisions. (For example: I dislike my cousin because he/she is extremely bossy; perhaps I should be wary of a job in which I'd be constantly supervised by my immediate superior.)

Implications of My Answers to Interests Questions

Question #1:

Question #2:

Question #3:

Question #4:

Question #5:

Following are questions about your abilities, aptitudes, and skills:

Self-Assessment of Abilities, Aptitudes, and Skills

1. What do I do best: work with people, work with data, work with things?

2. Do I (for example) write, paint, sculpt well? What special talents do I have?

3. Do I use tools well?

4. Can I be persuasive?

5. Can I make fine discriminations in the use of words and/or numbers?

6. Can I deal with abstract concepts?

7. As manager of my family's (or my own) household for _____ years, what skills have I learned (such as scheduling, budgeting, planning, mediating disputes, etc.)? Which were easy for me to learn, which were hard, and why?

8. As a paid working woman or volunteer (or both), what special aptitudes have I demonstrated on the job, and what special skills have I acquired? (For example: I became experienced at running meetings as a result of my Red Cross work; I learned to prepare a budget as treasurer of a church committee; I'm familiar with office routines and equipment because of my job in Company X, etc.)

Now try to summarize the implications of your answers to the questions above, by listing your abilities, aptitudes, and skills in order of their importance/ usefulness to you.

Summary of My Abilities, Aptitudes, and Skills

1. Most Important/Useful:

2. Very Important/Useful:

3. Somewhat Important/Useful:

The fourth and last category of questions concerns your strengths and limitations:

Self-Assessment of Strengths and Limitations

1. What special strengths do I have that can be further developed?

2. What limitations do I have that I can learn to work around, avoid, or for which I can seek help?

Consider the implications of these answers for your future career decisions and summarize them below. (For example: My skills in planning and budgeting have not been fully developed; I could pursue a job that would provide some training in, or exposure to, these areas. Or: I am not good at details; if I have that kind of job responsibility, I should get assistance in developing methods for keeping good records, or try to get someone else to do it.

Implications of My Answers to Strengths and Limitations Questions

Question #1:

Question #2:

Now that you have done some structured self-assessment, you are well prepared to explore the career alternatives open to you, and to determine the educational resources you will require, in other words, to start the process of career and education planning.

(If you want to proceed further with the self-assessment process, consult the bibliography for some useful references.)

5. CAREER PLANNING

There are three major steps you can follow in your career planning effort: (1) exploring occupations; (2) developing a career focus; and (3) developing a plan of action. Each of these three steps is discussed briefly below. The bibliography provides some good references you can use to find step-by-step guidelines for career planning. If your school has a career plan-

ning center or career counselors, you will find them to be useful resources. If not, your instructors or school library staff can probably help you find the kinds of references you'll need.

Major Steps in Career Planning

I. Explore Occupations

A. Learn about as many existing occupations as you can by reading reference books and talking to people. A basic reference is the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Directory of Occupational Titles; see also Woman's Work Book and Guide to Resources for Life/Career/Educational Planning for Adults, both listed in the bibliography.

B. Research future occupational trends in the same way.

C. Get specific information about occupations that particularly interest you: what the earnings levels and job requirements are; how people enter the field; what the opportunities are for entry and advancement, etc.

D. Learn about the occupational patterns and opportunities in your own community. You can interview local government officials; talk to the Chamber of Commerce; and consult the local or regional office of your county or state planning department.

II. Develop Career Focus

A. Choose two or three occupations (and levels of employment within those occupations) that fit your values, interests, skills, and abilities.

B. Make an in-depth study of each of these jobs. Imagine yourself having some specific jobs in each field. Check each one against what your self-assessment helped you to learn about yourself.

III. Develop a Plan of Action

Formulate some specific career goals and write them down. Include what you want to do; what you'll need to do to prepare yourself for that work; how you are going to go about it; how long it will take you; and the changes all this may imply for managing the rest of your life along the way.

What you are doing is self-directed, constructive, realistic career planning. Hard work; but it pays off!

Now you're ready to determine the kind of education you'll need in order to carry out your new career goals and plans.

6. EDUCATION PLANNING

Preparing to implement your new career plans will usually include some kind of educational component. The purpose of the educational effort you undertake will be to further your progress toward your new career and life goals. Listed below are the major steps in your education planning process.

Basic Steps in Education Planning

1. Make an inventory of your academic and job-related skills, strengths, weaknesses, and goals.

2. Determine which skills and strengths you will work to develop, and which weaknesses you will try to minimize.

3. Research available educational options (within this program and elsewhere), and develop alternative choices.

4. Formulate education goals that make sense in terms of your career goals, and write them down. Include what you want to study; where you want to study; how to get admitted; how long it will take you; and the changes all this may imply for managing the rest of your life along the way.

Again, you'll find useful references in the bibliography, and good resources in your school's career center, counselors, and library.

It's worthwhile to bear in mind that learning how to do career and education planning effectively is itself a form of education that will be useful to you for the rest of your life. To keep up with our rapidly changing world, you'll want to be able to make ongoing modifications in your plans, or even revise them completely, as time goes on.

Many women find these skills especially useful to them, as women. Perhaps, like many women, you have been accustomed to reacting to your environment, accommodating yourself to changing conditions rather than initiating change in directions chosen by you. Self-assessment can help you become more confident in your ability to make changes, and career and education planning can help you to implement them.

7. GETTING CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

We have described self-assessment as a process of gathering information about what one has learned in various life roles. In many educational institutions, this information can then be developed into a portfolio that the student can present for credit. This option is obviously a particularly useful one for the adult woman student.

At institutions where prior learning is not credited, the existence of a women's program (especially one with a strong experiential learning component) could be a force behind a move in this direction. For detailed information on how to prepare a portfolio, consult Assessing Prior Learning--A CAEL Handbook, and How to Get College Credit for What You Have Learned as a Homemaker and Volunteer (see bibliography).

Meanwhile, you might want to investigate the situation at your school by doing the following:

1. Find out if this program, or the school at which it is offered, grants credit for prior learning.

2. If so, find out some details to see if you can benefit.

3. If not, write down the names of two or three people you could talk with, to explore the possibility of starting a prior-learning-credit program at your school, and then meet with these people. Include at least one person in a position of sufficient authority to do something about your proposal.

PART II: FINDING A JOB/DEVELOPING YOUR OWN PLACEMENT

HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

The recommendations presented in this section work. We know, because many women have followed them, finding rewarding and satisfying jobs that they wanted, didn't settle for. However, developing your own placement takes TIME. If there is one must in developing your own placement, it is in establishing a workable timetable. It will keep you on track as you progress through your job campaign, provide a checklist of things to do, and a record of what you've already accomplished.

Also, it may be helpful to keep a notebook containing information picked up from leads, copies of want ads you applied to, and relevant information obtained from research.

When following suggestions in category 3 (page 24), you will find your local library an invaluable resource. The reference section contains directories that list all of these organizations, associations, and publications. In many cases, your library may subscribe to professional journals and trade publications.

1. ORGANIZING YOUR JOB SEARCH--TIMETABLES

Looking for a job is a job in itself, so organize yourself! This will enable you to keep track of all your employer contacts for follow-up and eventual placement. The following outline should be helpful:

1. Have a stable base of operation--mailing address and phone number where you can be reached immediately.

2. Have enough supplies on hand--envelopes and postage for mailing your résumé; stationery for cover letters, which matches the paper your résumé is printed on.

3. Have a typed supply of a concise, well-written résumé.

4. List all of the people you are going to tell that you're looking for a job: friends, neighbors, former employers, and former co-workers.

5. List prospective employers--as many organizations as possible in your area that employ people in your field; and/or are in the kind of business you want to enter (even if you compile the list from the Yellow Pages). Example: you're looking for a job in a bank; list and contact all the banks in your area.

6. Establish a timetable--set a target date for getting a job and make a mental commitment to it. Example: "In three months, I will have a job." Then map out on paper your job campaign strategy by day, week, and month. For example:

   Week 1

   a. Contact personal friends, former employers
   b. Compile list of prospective employers
   c. Read, follow up on Sunday want ads

   Week 2

   a. Mail résumé and cover letter to employers on list
   b. Re-contact friends for referrals
   c. Visit employment agencies

d. Send résumé and cover letter to friends' referrals
e. Research and compile information on employment prospects in field

Week 3

a. Contact employers from want ads (Week 1)
b. Phone employers to arrange interviews
c. Mail résumé to employment prospects

2. EMPLOYMENT MARKET

When conducting an unrelenting and aggressive job campaign (useful characteristics to possess when you're looking for a job), your employment market will be in the following five areas:

1. Personal contacts--<u>everyone</u> you know must know that you are looking for a job, even the working husbands of your housewife friends. They work somewhere and may know of openings; therefore, their companies may be able to hire you. List all your friends, friends of friends, <u>and</u> where they work.

2. Carefully-selected employment agencies--only those that specialize in recruiting and placing in your field/industry <u>and</u> salary range.

3. Want ads--not just newspapers, but also professional journals, trade magazines, and newsletters.

4. Resources available to women--feminist organizations, women's centers, professional and trade women's organizations.

5. Key employers in field--these are the individuals in organizations who make hiring decisions, <u>not</u> personnel. Example: You're looking for an entry-level position in marketing--call companies and ask

for the "name and title of the top person in marketing" (just ask for the name; you're not ready to speak to her or him yet). Mail your résumé and cover letter to that person.

3. THE HIDDEN JOB MARKET

The most successful self-developed placements are made through the "hidden job market." The hidden job market contains positions that are never listed in the Sunday newspaper want ads and never placed with employment agencies. In other words, approximately 80 percent of all jobs that become available are part of the hidden market. To find them, you must ferret out leads, be creative in devising new contacts, and persevere in following up all possibilities. To this end, the following suggestions should prove effective in reaching the market:

1. Explore the business sections of newspapers and business publications (New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Business Week). The more you read, the better informed you will become, particularly about personnel changes, expansion, and new product development.

2. Read trade magazines; they cover virtually every field, from food marketing to faith healing. Not only do they provide information about industry trends, but they also have classified ads.

3. Examine professional journals; they exist for nearly every profession. These directories are useful for compiling names and titles of employers in your field, and they have classified ads.

4. Research your industry through general business information, such as annual reports, company brochures, and recruiting pamphlets.

5. Familiarize yourself with trade associations, special interest groups that publish newsletters, which in turn have classified ads.

6. If you belong to a professional association, see that your name is in its talent bank or roster; this list is used as a recruiting source.

7 Visit a women's center. This organization has information on apprenticeship training programs and nontraditional jobs, and bulletin boards where job vacancies are posted.

8. If your field is covered by a union, check with union locals for possible vacancies in their union shops.

9. Look through women's magazines (Ms., Essence, Working Woman, New Directions for Women). They carry recruiting ads from companies that are seeking women.

10. Contact feminist organizations (National Organization for Women) for current information on affirmative action legislation and class action suits.

PART III: MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE

HOW TO USE PART III OF THIS HANDBOOK

In order for you to take full advantage of the workplace as a learning environment, you'll need to be prepared ahead of time, and you'll need some guidelines to follow after you're actually on the job. All of our experiences are learning experiences in some sense, of course. But the purpose of an experiential learning program is to assist students in developing a conscious, structured, self-directed approach to life situations (especially those outside the classroom), in order to transform an "ordinary" experience into a learning experience.

Many work experience educational programs include special courses to help students prepare for the work experience component of the program. Such courses may be offered either before the student starts her job, or concurrently with the job, or both. If your program offers such courses, so much the better. But if not, you can use this part of the handbook independently to prepare yourself for learning on the job, and as a guide to structuring your learning experience during the period of employment.

The first section of Part III is designed for completion before your job begins; sections 2 through 10 contain exercises designed for you to use, at the rate of one section per week, after you start working.

Keep writing in your journal. And good luck in making your work experience a worthwhile learning experience as well!

1. PREPARING FOR LEARNING ON THE JOB

Basic Skills. There are certain basic skills that will be extremely useful to you in making the workplace a place for learning. The basic experiential learning skills are:

1. observing
2. analyzing
3. researching
4. interviewing
5. reporting

You will need to know how to observe what happens around you, with an understanding eye; to analyze your observations and figure out what they mean; to do research on aspects of the job situation that are not immediately obvious to you, by formulating clear questions and then getting the answers either by reading or by talking to people; and (in most cases) to report in the classroom (either orally or in writing, formally or informally) on what you've learned at work.

Self-Awareness. Try to be aware of what you learned about yourself during the self-assessment process, and to relate your knowledge of your values, skills, interests, strengths, and limitations to what you experience on the job. The more specific the goals you have set for yourself concerning what you intend to learn on the job, the more useful your work experience will become as a learning experience.

Your Learning Plan. Better still, you can translate your learning goals into a detailed learning plan consisting of a series of very specific learning objectives. Your goals embody your purpose (e.g., improving your financial management skills); your objectives describe exactly how each purpose is to be attained (e.g., by the second week I will review five budgets prepared by others for the department I'm working in; by the

fourth week I will read and understand the annual budget for the entire organization; by the sixth week I will prepare a model budget for my own department, etc.).

Your program staff can help you prepare your learning plan. You can also consult College-Sponsored Experiential Learning--A CAEL Handbook for further ideas on how to go about this task (see bibliography).

Anticipating Change and Difficulties. You may find that, after all your careful planning, the work experience does not provide quite the learning opportunities you are seeking, or provides different ones. If this happens, you'll need to revise your original learning plan to incorporate what really takes place on the job. Sometimes personal problems, a change in your goals, or changes in your job duties might require you to revise your learning plan. Try to be prepared for this kind of thing.

Know What's Expected of You. It's a good idea to be completely aware in advance of the requirements and procedures of the work experience part of your program. Consider the following:

Some Questions to Clarify in Advance

1. What is expected of you by your school?
2. What is expected of you by your employer?
3. How will your performance during this period be assessed?
4. With whom can you discuss problems at the workplace?
5. What happens if the job doesn't seem to be working out?

You might try writing down all the questions you have in your mind about the details of this part of your program--and then, after you get the answers, recording them in writing as well.

2. DETERMINING YOUR WORK VALUES

Your previous job, volunteer, or homemaking experience can serve as a useful guide to what you want out of the work experience part of this program.

Reflect on your past work experience. What would you like to repeat or avoid in this job? To help you answer this question, describe briefly how your preferred workplace is different from, or similar to, the ones you have known (this includes the home as a workplace), in terms of the following characteristics and work values.

Characteristics and Values	Description of Past vs. Current Workplace
Organizational Structure	
Private	
Public	
Nonprofit	
Large office or plant	
Small office or plant	
Work in the "field"	
Economic Security	
Pay	
Fringe benefits	
Advancement	

Characteristics and Values	Description of Past vs. Current Workplace
Location	
Accessible to:	
home	
shopping	
cultural resources	
Personal/Career	
Interesting work	
Responsibility/decisions	
Freedom to do job own way	
Participate in goal setting	
Important work	
Opportunity to use initiative	
Status/recognition	
Work Environment: Co-workers	
Friendships	
Identification (relating; belonging)	
Teamwork	
Helping others	
Being helped	
Work Environment: Supervisors	
Fair treatment	
Praise	
Attention	
Helpful attitude	
Feedback on progress	

Now review what you've written, and circle the characteristics and work values that are most important to you.

After you have completed the above exercise, write a brief statement about the particular things you wish to learn from your current work experience. (Consider

thoughtfully. Later on, you'll be comparing what you actually learned on the job with what you initially hoped to learn, using this and subsequent exercises as references.)

3. ORIENTATION TO THE WORKPLACE

As soon as you arrive at your workplace, it is important to become oriented, involved, and to start learning.

Since you're new to the organization (if not, pretend you are for the purposes of these exercises), your first move should be to take an overall look at its structure and to identify where you fit into it. The immediate purpose is to help you establish a sense of identity. (Later on, you'll use the information you gather now to study the lines of communication, responsibility, power, and authority within the organization.)

Orientation Exercises

Part I

Start by requesting a meeting with your supervisor to ask the following questions.* Record what you find out.

1. What is my job description?

2. What does this office/department do? Is there a particular schedule or sequence?

3. To whom do I report? With whom do I work--and for what purposes? Who else might give me assignments? What do I do if there seems to be a question of priorities with my time?

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*You may wish to modify these questions. You may know the answers to some of them already. And you may have other questions.

4. What tips can you give me on how best to work here? Are there areas in which you'd like me to try to take initiative? Other areas where it is best not to? Is there anything I should read or any meetings I should attend (either here or on my own time)? Are there any people in particular I should talk to in order to get oriented? If I find I'm not busy, are there things you'd like me to do? Are there any particular problems a new person is likely to experience?

5. How will I know how well I've done? How do I get feedback?

Part II

Try to draw an organizational chart for as much of the organization as you can, and identify your position in it. Label all boxes clearly. If possible, identify line, staff, and functional areas of authority.* Indicate whether the mode of authority is formal or informal in nature. Indicate the person(s) to whom you are immediately responsible, and those who depend on you in order to complete their own jobs.

Part III

Having located yourself within the framework of your workplace, you can now begin to look around and observe your immediate surroundings. Get to know your coworkers, their work functions, the physical set-up of the office. In addition (during your lunch hour, or as you leave work), check out your new working neighborhood. What services, recreation, eating facilities, etc., are nearby? Remember to reflect. Take notes in

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*In business organizations, line jobs involve operational responsibility (e.g., production, distribution); staff jobs involve support services (e.g., research and development, personnel).

your journal. Especially at the start of this new work experience, you will want to think about such questions as:

> How is the workplace different from what you had expected it to be? How are the people different? How are the assignments different? What is your most significant or impressive experience or observation during the first week?

4. YOUR ROLE IN THE WORKFLOW: WHERE YOU FIT IN AND HOW YOU'RE DOING

To learn as much as you can and to grow and improve as much as possible during your work experience, you need to know how others see you. You need to know how you fit in, and to understand the impact of your involvement on co-workers or other departments in the organization.

Understanding Your Role in the Organization

Part I

Arrange another meeting with your supervisor after a week or so and ask the questions below. These questions concern the flow of work and the different tasks and roles within your organization.

1. How well have I learned or performed assignments? How can I improve? Any particular area to concentrate on?

2. Are there additional areas or tasks I should take on?

3. What is the workflow? Where does a task start, continue, and end? Who else besides me is involved? (Interview those individuals and try to chart the process on paper.)

Part II

Take one specific function that you routinely perform (whether it is entering an amount in a ledger, displaying merchandise, talking with clients, or delivering a parcel), and trace the source from which it originated. Then trace how your job activity affects others. (For example: you are working in the stock room of a department store and receive a requisition for ten boxes of shirts. The order originates from the manager of the men's shirt department, who needs the shirts to stock his shelves; your delivery of the stock fulfills that need. In addition, you record the fact that your stock of shirts has now dropped by ten boxes, which alerts the merchandise department to reorder. Thus, you are also involved in inventory control, and your work has an impact on the activities of the merchandise buyers.) You can do this exercise as a list of actions, or as a chart of the flow of these actions --whichever seems more appropriate to you.

5. UNDERSTANDING CAREER LADDERS AT YOUR WORKPLACE

A career ladder is the path someone follows through an organization (or from one organization to the next), from an entry-level job to successive positions of increasing responsibility, skill, authority, status, and pay. Power and control increase along the way. Before you can plan your own future within an organization, you must make sense of the existing career ladders and realistically consider your alternatives.

Having now determined where you are in the organization and what your function means to the operation, you can

begin to discover where planning and policymaking occur, where control originates, where decisions are made, and where leadership is exercised in the organization.

Analyzing Career Ladders

1. Choose a department of your organization and investigate and describe the duties and responsibilities of the people who are responsible for running it. Then find out what major qualifications someone has to have in order to obtain those positions --specific skills, level of education, experience, etc. Now take a specific position at the highest level of your organization and construct the ladder, step by step, that you would climb to reach that position. Also identify the qualities that you think someone aspiring to that position should have (apart from education, job skills, or experience)--such as leadership ability, interpersonal skills, or other attributes.

2. Examine the style of leadership in your organization as a whole, and try to classify it. This will help you figure out how people who want to be promoted are expected to behave, both when managing and when being managed or supervised. (Some typical leadership styles are: autocratic, participative, formal, informal, loose-rein, hierarchical. More than one label may be necessary to describe your organization.)

3. Leadership styles may vary widely within the same organization. Classify (by their individual leadership styles) the person you report to, the person your boss reports to, and the head of the organization.

6. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE WORKPLACE

Now that you have taken a good hard look at the organization as a whole, your place in it, and some of the career paths to the top, it's time to take a closer look at those with whom you are in daily contact--who they are, how they interrelate with you, and how they react to their own situations.

Complete the following exercise.

Analyzing the Workplace

As a future manager, you will be concerned with human relations factors in the work world throughout your career. The dynamics of the workplace or work group are of enormous importance in terms of productivity, need fulfillment, peer relationships, and personal satisfaction. Understanding what prompts the behavior of others, and knowing how to respond to them, is as necessary as assessing ourselves and being aware of our own behavior patterns. The grouchy supervisor may be frustrated by an inability to relate to his or her workers; the eager beaver may be aggressively ambitious; the lazy co-worker may have tuned out because of poor communication from the boss. The effects of such dynamics on the group can have far-reaching consequences. In light of these factors, do the following:

1. Compose a capsule description of your immediate co-workers (including your supervisor), depicting their work habits, behavior patterns, and apparent motivations. Your statement should include their reactions to authority and acceptance of responsibility. Which factors do you feel make them good or bad employees?

2. Next, take a look at the physical work environment and assess its effect on work activity. Is the office too cramped, is there enough light, are the

surroundings pleasant? How do you and your co-workers respond to the work environment and how could it be improved?

3. Lastly, take one particular work day and make notes on all behavioral aspects of your co-workers' activities: who loses his or her temper and why, how well does the supervisor handle a problem and in what way, etc. Afterwards, review your notes and try to summarize what you learned through your observations.

7. THE CULTURE AND SOCIOLOGY OF THE WORKPLACE

You are now going to probe more specifically into the cultural and sociological aspects of your workplace. Try to be very observant as you categorize job tasks and people. This process should help you analyze what makes your workplace "tick" and which aspects you like or dislike.

Answer the following questions in essay form.

Culture of the Workplace

1. What are the customs in your work setting that are repeated with some consistency? For each one, who participates in them? Do you? Why or why not?

2. What values have you noticed that people hold in your work setting? Give examples. Are any of these values in conflict with each other. Please explain fully.

3. Who sets the standards in your work setting? How do people know how well they are doing? Give as many examples as you can concerning such performance standards and feedback.

Sociology of the Workplace

1. Who trained or socialized you on your job? How was it done? How long did it take? Was it done to your satisfaction? If not, why not?

2. Everyone in a work setting has an assigned or official status based on title. Everyone also has a personal status that indicates the esteem others have for him or her. Give three examples of individuals from your work setting, describing in detail both their official and personal status, and noting similarities or differences between the two types of status for each of these people. Then repeat the same process, using yourself as the subject of the analysis.

8. POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE WORKPLACE

You should find it interesting at this point to examine who holds power and influence, and the way they are used, in your organization.

1. Draw a model floor plan of your office or work setting. Include: desks, chairs, other office furniture and equipment (such as rugs, pictures, Xerox machines, etc.). Indicate the job title of the person assigned to each desk or space.

2. After you have drawn your floor plan, answer the following questions:

   a. What did you learn about the person who holds the power in your work environment, based on the location and decor of offices and/or work sites? Please explain in detail.

b. What are the formal and informal lines of communication in your work setting? Who talks to whom and for what purpose? Whom do you talk to? For what reasons?

c. With whom do you associate on the job? Are these people part of a larger group? How and why was it formed? Would you describe this as a formal or an informal association? Are you part of other groups as well? Please describe fully.

9. ECONOMICS AND THE WORKPLACE

You're going to approach this subject on two levels--the personal and the organizational.

1. Maintain an itemized budget of all your expenses for the next week in order to identify how your money is spent. At the end of the week, summarize and classify your various expenses and consider the implications. Were there any totals that surprised you?

2. Consider the following questions thoroughly before answering them.

   a. How do you manage the resources around you on the job? What is there too little of? What is there too much of?

   b. Are you producing goods or services? Explain. Are they in demand? Why?

   c. How is your organization financed? By public (federal, state, or local government) money? By income from products it sells or services it performs? By private contributions? Other? By some combination of these factors?

d. Do people share or compete for resources in this work environment? When? How? Do some people share and others compete? Give examples.

e. Are technological factors such as automation affecting this workplace? How? Be specific.

f. What are the compensations that you receive for or from this work (financial; exposure to a field; a chance to work with knowledgeable people; access to useful resources, etc.)?

10. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The time has now come to make the final analysis of your field experience.

In the classroom, you've studied subjects related to your work. In class or through independent study, you were introduced to the world of work, and learned what to look for and what to expect. You have now had the opportunity to put it all to the test in an actual work environment, to observe the realities instead of just studying the theories.

You're currently in a position to review all that has happened to you, reflect on it, and draw some conclusions that, in turn, will influence your future. Before you began your job, you wrote down what you hoped to learn from it. Now that it is ending, have you learned what you originally intended? What else have you learned? Are these other learnings more or less valuable than what you'd intended? To help you reflect on these questions, please review your exercises (questions and answers) and journal notes, and consider carefully all the questions below before you begin writing your answers.

1. Refer to your classroom notes and assignments; try to draw parallels or make comparisons with what you have experienced or observed at your work site. Indicate which particular aspects of each course applied to your work experiences, and how the concepts learned in class may have differed from what you found in practice.

2. Describe your workplace. How does it differ from the ideal or preferred workplace you described in exercise #2? As a result of this experience, would you now change your ideal? In what respects?

3. Review your self-assessment notes, and exercise #2 (in Part III) again. Describe what you now see as your lifestyle values; your preferred work environment; your preferred working role; and, in general, your career plans and skills; and your educational goals. Have there been significant changes since you first considered these questions? What has influenced these changes?

4. In conclusion, use this experience to draw up a new list of goals and objectives for your next job. What new learning or personal objectives do you have now? --for course work? --for the workplace? --for other life activities or personal development?

5. Are you, on the whole, glad that you decided to participate in this program? Why or why not?

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